

# MUHAMMAD ALI MEMORIAL WEEK AND FUNERAL

[JUNE 4-10]

REFLECTIONS FROM  
LOUISVILLE MAYOR GREG FISCHER

PREPARED BY  
MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS STAFF

"MUHAMMAD ALI BELONGS TO THE WORLD, BUT HE ONLY HAS ONE HOMETOWN."

MAYOR GREG FISCHER, JUNE 4, 2016

A photograph of a memorial site. In the foreground, there are several bouquets of flowers, including red and white roses and yellow flowers. A small portrait of a man is placed on a concrete surface. To the right, a cardboard box with the name 'Teters' is visible. The background shows a fence and more flowers.

# CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Initial communications	3
Media requests	4
Social media strategy	6
Alilouisville.com	9
I AM ALI festival	12
The Greatest Ride	14
Speeches/power of words	15
Closing	18
Samples of media coverage	19

# INTRODUCTION

The June 3, 2016 death of Muhammad Ali, who was perhaps the most well-known and beloved citizen on Earth, was a significant moment globally. But it was especially poignant for his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, where The Greatest of All Time would be mourned over a period of seven days in front of a global print, television and social media audience numbering in the billions.

From an initial call from Bob Gunnell, head of BoxcarPR, the public relations firm that represented the Ali family, alerting Mayor Greg Fischer's Office that Ali was gravely ill and could die with hours, to his burial one week later, the Mayor's Communications team and broader Metro Communications team was involved in nearly every aspect of the celebration of Ali's life and his burial.

We immediately identified the role that we as a government entity could play in what was essentially a process that had no significant governmental role. Muhammad Ali was never elected to office. He was an athlete and humanitarian who'd grown up in our city and maintained ties here throughout his life.

But our team, led by Mayor Fischer, understood that the role of a mayor is – or should be – more than managing the logistical processes of government. In some cases, our role is to help guide, even channel, the

sentiments of our citizens. We also knew that this was a rare opportunity to showcase our city on a global stage, and we felt a huge responsibility to do that well on behalf of our citizens.

BoxcarPR, the firm that was tasked with preparing for and executing Muhammad Ali's funeral developed "The Book" a confidential plan that followed Muhammad's wishes for his memorial. However, the city had not developed a comprehensive communications strategy for the global event – and even details of "The Book" changed with news of Ali's death.

We initially expected the burial to occur very quickly after Ali's death. Instead, it was planned for one week later. So instead of a role expected to largely involve logistics and public safety, Louisville also needed a communications plan for a full week between death and funeral.

The following case study examines how the Communications Team quickly developed, planned and delivered a coordinated strategy for dealing with the ensuing local, national and international spotlight, and includes assessments of what we did right, what we might have done better, as well as lessons for other cities that may one day find themselves suddenly thrust into that global spotlight.



## Over the course of seven days, our Communications team:

- Fielded hundreds of media calls from across the world;
- Created and launched, in 24 hours, a robust website (alilouisville.com) that became the primary source of information for both journalists and visitors/ Ali fans;
- Created and organized the “I Am Ali” festival for children, drawing 15,000 attendees;
- Worked with external partners to organize and promote “The Greatest” bike ride to key Ali sites in Louisville;
- Created a social media strategy to tell the Ali story visually, through images and videos, reaching millions of people;
- Collaborated with both Boxcar PR, which represented the Ali family, and with the Muhammad Ali Center, on logistics throughout the week, including a nearly 20-mile funeral procession and ceremony that drew hundreds of dignitaries and celebrities from around the world;
- Organized press conferences where Mayor Fischer delivered speeches that marked the significance of Ali’s life and death – and set the stage for the “celebrating a full life, well-lived” tone of the week.



Throughout it all, we never lost track of the fact that Louisville was in the global spotlight. We mowed vacant lots; we picked up litter; we staged volunteers wearing “I Am Ali” T-shirts throughout the community to help guide visitors, and remind the world that we are a city of compassion.

# INITIAL COMMUNICATIONS

Ali's death was officially announced at about 12:15 a.m. (EST), Saturday, June 4. (He died in Phoenix, two hours behind Louisville.)

A small group of people in the Louisville Mayor's Office were notified before it was officially announced, and a written statement from the Mayor was ready to be distributed within minutes of the family's announcement.

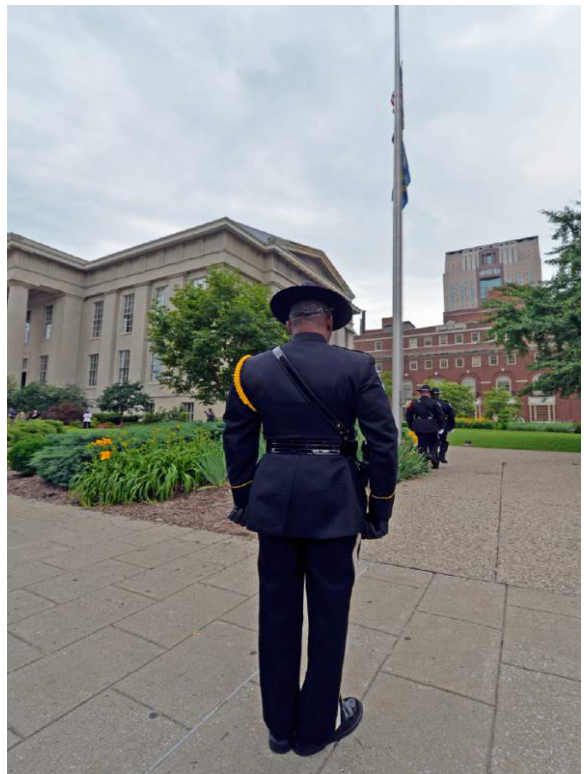
Bob Gunnell regularly updated the Mayor's Chief of Staff with Ali's condition and since Ali died late at night gave the Mayor's Office time to prepare for a flag-lowering ceremony that occurred in front of Metro Hall (the executive seat of local government) at 10 a.m. the next morning. This simple ceremony, carried live by local and national networks and picked up internationally, provided the first visuals for a hungry media. And as the first significant reflection on Ali's life, it helped set the tone for the six days of mourning that would follow.

The ceremony, which attracted several hundred people and was carried to a worldwide audience, underscored for us how important a setting and words can be in such situations.

The Mayor's podium was positioned near the flag pole outside Metro Hall, flanked by a solemn Louisville Metro Police honor guard. Remarks by Mayor Fischer and Donald Lassere, president of the Ali Center, were poignant and affirmed Ali's status as an international treasure, a beloved world dignitary. Before and after the event, an audio tract of Ali's fights and his own voice filled the plaza, prompting those in attendance to speak in hushed, respectful tones.

The ceremony was global in scale, but uniquely Louisville, with Ali's hometown friends in attendance, lingering afterward to share stories and photos.

As the Mayor said in his oft-quoted speech that morning, "Muhammad Ali belongs to the world, but he only has one hometown."



# MEDIA REQUESTS

The world media descended on Louisville almost immediately. From Britain, Germany, France, Spain and Ireland to Bangladesh, Japan and China, there were media representatives from all over the globe. It began within hours of the announcement of Ali's death, and it continued all week. We thought there would be a lull after the first 48 hours and until the day before the funeral. But we were wrong; national and international media came and stayed, and the swarm grew every day, with the Ali Center plaza and its makeshift memorial as the focal point.

The Muhammad Ali Center's small communications team was quickly overwhelmed on

the day after Ali died, at a time when they and their staff also were dealing with a very personal and emotional loss.

Louisville Metro Government's Communication team moved to the Ali Center all day Saturday to help, creating a partnership with Center officials and Boxcar that extended through the week.

In part because we'd worked with each other before and in part because we all recognized the magnitude of the job, we were able to set aside egos and establish a culture of cooperation that allowed us all to focus on getting the job done.

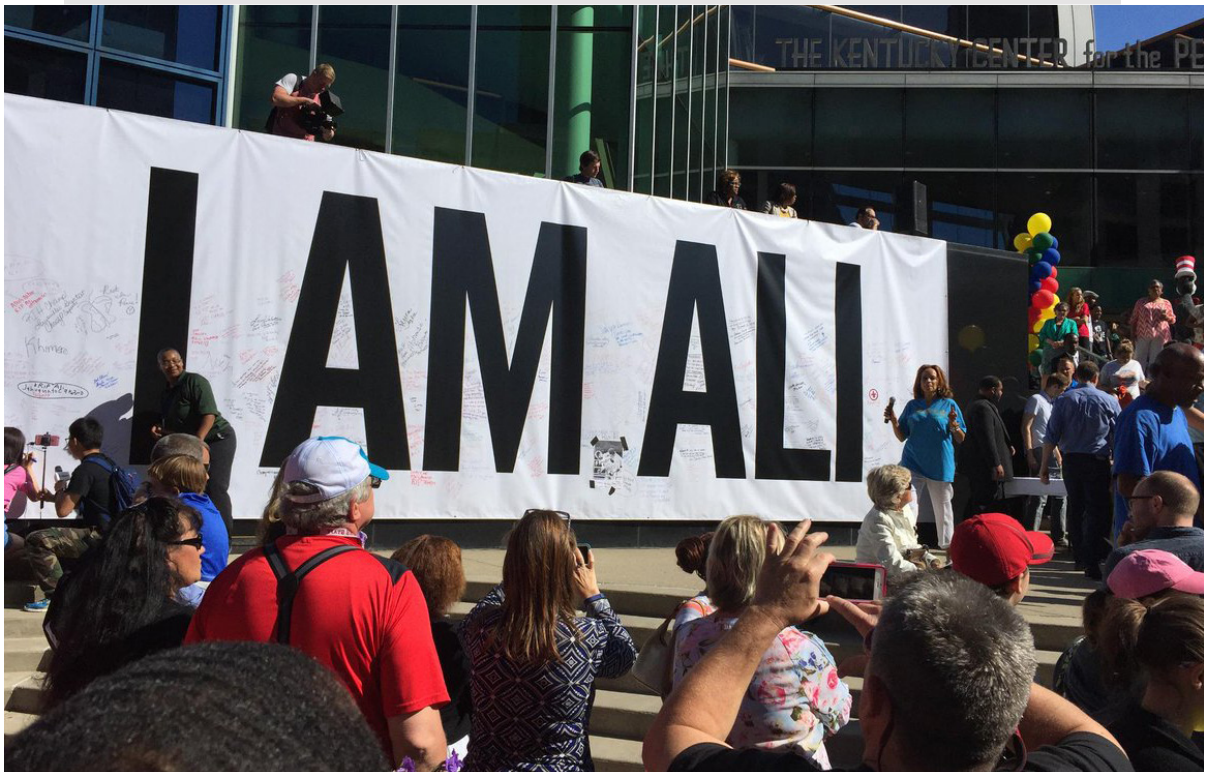
## WHAT WE DID RIGHT

- **We were organized:** On the first day, we established a system for handling the scores of media interview requests for the Mayor and Lassere, including an Excel spreadsheet that listed the name of the reporter, the media outlet and contact information, as well as what they wanted – Phone interview? Immediate live interview? To set up a future interview?





- **We were responsive:** We pushed contact information for the Mayor’s Communications Director and Deputy Director out on our website and on social media immediately, so that outside media had a connection. We answered all calls and gave whatever information we could, establishing ourselves right away as trustworthy, knowledgeable and helpful sources.
- **We recognized needs and opportunities:** Realizing that “The Book” included no plans for an immediate “event” for Louisvillians to express their grief and for the media to cover, we staged the simple flag-lowering ceremony at Metro Hall. It was covered by local, national and international media. Similarly, when we saw that scores of citizens and visitors were eager to celebrate Ali’s life days before the funeral was planned, we created the “I Am Ali” festival.



- **We were Social:** Recognizing that national and international media would not know Ali’s Louisville, we created a webpage that provided a quick glimpse of things they would need to know – landmarks; biographical information; information related to boxing; and plans for the funeral. We added a link where citizens could share stories. The website quickly became a tool for outside media trying to find local contacts and context.

- **We were equipped:** The Mayor’s Director of Communications had been deliberate in building a diverse and talented team, and charging each one with specific responsibilities – writing, editing, social media. So in the moments after we learned of Ali’s impending death, there was no scramble about who would do what; we did what we were hired to do. In addition, recognizing the scale of our task, we immediately involved about a dozen talented communicators from other Louisville Metro Government agencies, from Louisville Forward and Special Events to Community Services and Metro TV.



## WHAT WE MIGHT HAVE DONE BETTER

- City leaders for years had relied on the knowledge that the Ali family and their public relations representatives, and lawyers had a plan (“The Book”) for handling Ali’s eventual death. We knew their plan, and knew our role in it – basically, one or two days providing public safety assistance. But we failed to understand that we would need our own plan – a plan for the city, not the celebrity. We should have prepared that years ago.
- Though major interviews were recorded on the Mayor’s schedule, we stopped, after the first day, keeping track of the media who just grabbed him for interviews before or after events, so we don’t have as robust a record as we’d like.



## LESSONS FOR OTHERS

- It is difficult to plan for the death of anyone, especially a beloved, prominent citizen. But planning is key – as is being able to adjust the plan when the time comes. So, prepare a plan with options – for one day, for two, for a week. Rehearse the plan. Adjust the plan regularly. And then, be prepared to completely change it.
- Don’t rely only on outside sources to do your city’s planning. Figure out what is right for your city, which may not be what the famous person’s loved ones are thinking about. (Example: our “I Am Ali Festival.”)
- Do what you can NOW. Create a one-stop website or web page for important/famous people from your community. Create a factsheet and a photo library of famous people from your town and keep it updated. Make sure it’s organized in a way that makes it easy to grab quickly. Put it in a place that all communications staffers can access (and know how to find in an emergency). (See links to sample coverage below)



# SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

From the beginning of the week, we used social media to respond to news of Ali's death in three distinct ways:

- As tools to provide news and to mobilize citizens to various events happening in the city;
- To create places for remembrances and to pay tribute;
- To provide platforms for telling the story of the week.

This was achieved on four platforms with specific goals for each: **Twitter/Periscope**, with an emphasis on disseminating news and storytelling; **Facebook**, with an emphasis on marketing events and web resources; **Instagram**, with an emphasis on remembrances and tributes.

The first hours after the news broke were dedicated to paying tribute and to storytelling. Hundreds watched the Periscope and Facebook Live streams of Mayor Fischer's speech at the flag-lowering on Saturday morning, while millions watched broadcasts on global television networks. We focused heavily on visuals — memorials, mourners, videos of fans discussing Ali.

In the following days, we did fewer memorials and a significant number of posts promoting alilouisville.com and I Am Ali. About 10 percent of alilouisville.com homepage traffic came from Facebook.

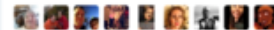


Muhammad Ali, thank you for being [#TheGreatest](#). Goodbye.



RETWEETS  
577

LIKES  
1,088





2,040,616 people reached

Boost Post

501K Views

Like Comment Share

As we moved closer to the funeral, we focused on storytelling with video. This culminated in the funeral procession through the city. We stationed Metro communicators at a dozen sites along the 19-mile procession to gather photos, videos and observations from those along the route.

We loaded all content onto the mobile app Slack, where the best material was curated by our dedicated social media manager to tell the story of the procession in real time on Twitter. (Slack allows users to communicate with each other as they share raw photos/video/words.) On Facebook, we were more selective, choosing the best material and crafting clear messages with each photo or video. We kept this up through the day, selectively choosing tonally appropriate images and messages for the procession and the funeral.

The result was an unprecedented spike in social engagement. Facebook post engagement for the week was **744 percent** better than the week prior. Page likes and reach spiked dramatically, too. One video, in particular, reached **2 million** Facebook users and was viewed by **500,000** people. Twitter impressions were dramatically up as well — **1.3 million** from June 3-11, compared to 338,500 for the previous nine-day period.

Instagram likes were also up, but at a lesser level. The Mayor's Twitter page had **400,000** impressions on the day of the funeral alone, driven largely by the procession coverage.





## WHAT WE DID RIGHT

- By telling the story of the procession, we were able to keep interested parties informed (“Where is it now?”) while also showing the community and world the goodwill being demonstrated across the city. By carefully curating the content, we were able to keep users engaged to the feed. Meanwhile, careful and timely crafting of Facebook posts allowed us to get maximum engagement.
- We effectively used eye-catching graphics to communicate messages on Twitter, such as Ali’s Louisville and the I Am Ali Festival.
- We used each platform strategically, and engaged users where appropriate.
- We used Slack to share information and images during the procession



## WHAT WE MIGHT HAVE DONE BETTER

- We should have integrated social media more into alilouisville.com.
- We could have developed ways to engage users more in a back and forth conversation, such as a Twitter or Periscope chat with a biographer, or asked residents their memories of Ali in a more effective way (attempts to do this during the week failed).
- We could have considered creating web stories that were maximized for social engagement, perhaps using Medium.
- On the day of the procession, we should have had the Social Media manager working from our Emergency Operations Center, where streams of information from media partners and agencies, including integrated audio and visual technologies, would have allowed him to have better monitored activities and alerted those on the field of any changes/updates.

<https://storify.com/louisvillemayor/louisville-says-goodbye-to-muhammad-ali#-publicize>



# CREATION OF ALILOUISVILLE.COM

Soon after it was announced that Ali's funeral would be in Louisville, we began hearing from national and international media who were unfamiliar with the city and in need of suggestions for landmarks to shoot, people to interview, places of significance to Ali and his family.

That's when we realized that while there are many websites devoted to Ali, there was no site devoted solely to Ali's Louisville – the home where he grew up, the schools he attended, the gym where he learned to box, etc.

The communications team quickly reserved several web domain names in an effort to secure names that might be taken by others, but also to find one we could use to central-

ize all online information from the city. Of the domain names we reserved, we decided on [www.alilouisville.com](http://www.alilouisville.com) because we wanted a domain with the city in the name, setting it apart from websites focused on his boxing career, the Ali Center, etc. The URL also redirected to the city's main website.

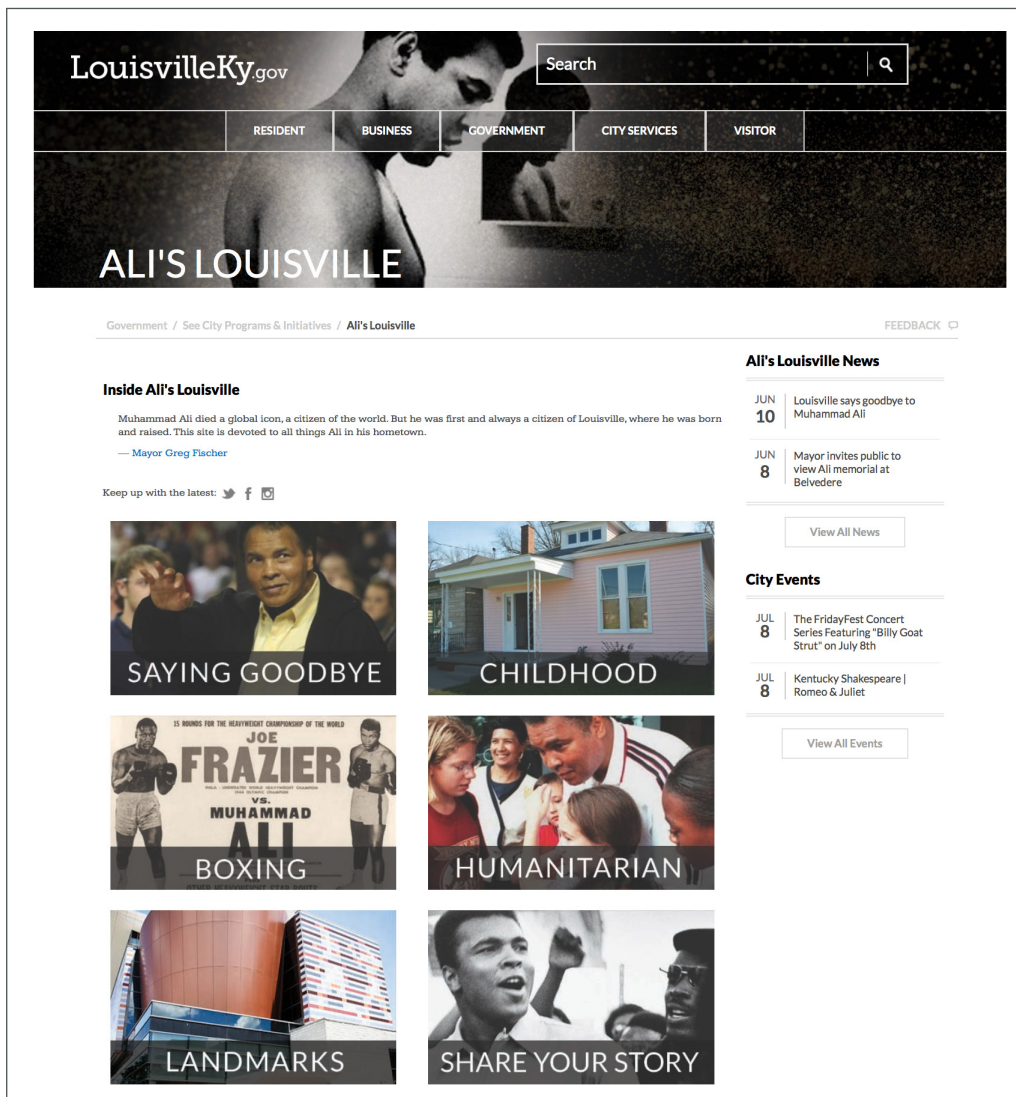
On Sunday, June 5, the core communicators met all day at Metro Hall to decide what information the site should include, how it should be presented, and to compile and edit that information. Our decisions were partly based on what information was missing from the [Alicenter.org](http://Alicenter.org) website -- such as a comprehensive bio, and local landmarks that might be useful for media and interesting for visitors.

## **Ultimately, we decided to create separate pages for each six categories:**

- Events Honoring Ali – updated through the week as new events were added;
- Childhood - information about his childhood in Louisville;
- Boxing - his history in the ring;
- Humanitarian – his passion outside the ring;
- Landmarks – a list and interactive map of places in Louisville tied to The Champ; set up so it was useful on a smartphone as well as computer;
- Share Your Story – A web form where people could share their stories about encounters with Ali.

The site included photos, contact information and links to background information,

as well as links to the Mayor's social media on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.



## WHAT WE DID RIGHT

- We did not shrink from the task. Creating a website in a matter of hours was daunting, but we have a talented staff and knew that by working together, we could do it.

- We wasted no time. We met immediately to create and execute our plan, and once certain it was go, we began promoting it, which made us the go-to spot for media and visitors.
- We broke up in teams to write the content and get photographs, which hastened the process. (We took some photos ourselves that day. Others came from our archives or the archives of the local newspaper, The Courier-Journal; its editor agreed to let us use those with attribution.)
- Instead of trying to cover every element of Ali's life, we focused on what we saw was missing – Ali's life in Louisville.

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## WHAT WE MIGHT HAVE DONE BETTER

- We could have done this years ago, setting a framework and updating it along the way. It could have lived on the city website, where it would have drawn interest even before Ali's death.
- On the day we got rolling, we should have had a longer brainstorming and organizational meeting, to ensure all contributors were heard, that all pieces were aligned and that tasks weren't duplicated.
- We should have embedded our Twitter feed to the alilouisville.com site to show the posts in real time.
- We didn't consistently promote a central hashtag that matched our URL (#alilouisville) for all of the events going on so that everyone in town could post images and video and stories to one location on Twitter.

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## LESSONS FOR OTHERS

- Think about doing this sort of thing now. Gather data and photos; get permission to borrow from others now. (We were just lucky that the editor of the newspaper answers his email on a Sunday!) Make sure when you are developing a new site that you keep mobile users in mind first. They now represent more than 50 percent of the visitors to our site.

Photos/links

<http://www.alilouisville.com>



# I AM ALI

JOIN US WEDNESDAY TO CELEBRATE THE GREATEST



## “I AM ALI” FESTIVAL

Immediately after Ali's death, it became clear that Louisvillians were hungry for ways to mark his passing and celebrate his life. That includes our children, many of whom, like Ali, face the barriers of poverty and race. Noting that one of the shining lessons of Ali's life is that any child, regardless of where they are born, can grow up and be the “Greatest” at whatever they choose in life, Mayor Fischer wanted to create the “I Am Ali” festival, to give children an opportunity to not only learn about Ali's life, but to explore areas

that might spark their dreams. The Louisville Convention and Visitors Bureau played an integral part in this festival and all of the week's events.

The Festival, held at the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts (on a day when the Broadway Series' Phantom of the Opera was slated for a 7 p.m. show time), hosted dozens of activities for children, ranging from arts and culture, to math, science, literacy, as well as physical activities. And 15,000 people attended.

All the activities areas were sponsored for free by different community groups, including the Ali Center, JCPS, KCA, The Kentucky Science Center, JCTC, Actors Theatre of Louisville, JCTA, the Louisville Zoo and Metro Parks & Recreation. In addition to the many

activities, there were musical performances inside and outside. And, children were encouraged to visit the Ali Center across the pedway and place a flower (donated by Kroger) at a makeshift memorial that had sprung up at the Center.



## + WHAT WE DID RIGHT

- We involved community partners; this was too big an effort to create and execute in two days on our own. Our Special Events team, in conjunction with the Mayor's Office, worked with their connections and partnerships across the city to secure a venue, signage, activities, entertainment and decorations.
- Through the collaboration among our Communications Team, the Mayor's Office and Special Events, we were able to successfully create a message and implement that vision throughout the festival. We knew it would only be successful if parents understood that this would be a fun and educational experience for their children, in Ali's memory. We communicated that through our press releases, speeches, and by talking with members of the media to ensure that they understood the message.

## - WHAT WE MIGHT HAVE DONE BETTER

- The activities were heavily tilted toward children ages 4-10, but it drew older children as well. We should have planned more activities for older children.
- Since the event was during the day (the only time that KCA could allow the use of its facility), many families with working parents were unable to participate. A future Festival should include both daytime and evening events.

- We should have released the logo to the media after announcement of the festival. With this being a first-year event, television and print media had no images to present to their viewers/readers. A logo would have given the media a visual aid that would have led to even better media exposure.
- We should have called in our Special Events Team sooner, allowing them more time to plan.

## LESSONS FOR OTHERS

- None of this would have been possible without teamwork. Producing a festival this size would normally take 6 months. Through the coordination of hundreds of people across the city with whom we'd worked before, we pulled it off in two days.
- There was very little time to get this done, which created a sense of urgency that was motivating. We established a plan and strict deadlines for every piece, which was critical to the festival's success.

Photos/Links

<http://www.wlky.com/news/i-am-ali-festival-kicks-off-wednesday-at-kentucky-center/39954874>

<http://www.local10.com/entertainment/children-sign-i-am-ali-banner-at-event-in-louisville-kentucky>

<http://boxingjunkie.usatoday.com/2016/06/06/city-unveils-new-i-am-ali-festival-website/>

<http://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/boxing/muhamad-ali/2016/06/08/childrens-festival-lets-kids-like-ali/85557684/>

<http://www.whas11.com/news/local/i-am-ali-celebrates-muhammad-alis-life/237409265>





# “THE GREATEST RIDE”



Louisville is becoming known as a city of cyclists, and Mayor Fischer’s sister, Lynn Fischer, initiated the idea of developing a bike ride with stops at local Ali landmarks.

The city worked with others to develop “The Greatest Ride,” which was held on Thursday, June 9, beginning from the Ali Center. The ride’s stops included:

- Ali’s Childhood Home Museum – 3302 Grand Ave.;
- Ali’s Elementary School –the former Virginia Avenue School, which is now the West End School;
- Ali’s High School – Central High School;
- Columbia Gym (where he learned to box);
- Smoketown art monument to Ali;
- Mural on East Broadway that depicts Ali during the Sonny Liston fight.

Immediately after the idea was approved, our team began getting the word out to other local bike enthusiasts and the media. We partnered with a new bicycle touring company in town, Louisville Bicycle Tours, which donated 15 free loaner bikes for anyone who didn’t have one but wanted to participate. The Louisville Bicycle Club also provided bike assistance, SAG support and a sound system for the ride.

Spalding University President Tori Murden McClure, who used to work for the Ali Center and family, host the ride. We contacted George and Evan Bochetto, who own Ali’s

childhood home, to provide an on-site history of the house; arranged for Paul Percent, chairman of the West End School, to be there to talk about that building’s history; and for Central High School Principal Raymond Green to tell a little about Ali’s time there.

On Wednesday, June 8, we were advised that ESPN wanted to film the ride for ESPN Sports Center, and we arranged bikes for their crew. Mayor Fischer kicked off the ride with an inspiring speech about Ali, and ESPN did an opening for Sports Center to officially begin the ride.

## **+ WHAT WE DID RIGHT**

- We tapped the expertise in our office and community to get this set up in less than two days.
- We promoted it, and drew an estimated 500 riders and a great deal of media attention, including from ESPN, which opened a segment of its Sports Center from the ride.



## **- WHAT WE MIGHT HAVE DONE BETTER**

- We underestimated the crowd. Given its size, we could have used a better sound system.
- We should have provided water for the riders. Though the ride was only 13.8 miles, it was hot, and not all riders were experienced.

Photos/links

<https://louisvilleky.gov/news/%E2%80%9Cgreatest%E2%80%9D-bicycle-ride-honor-ali>

<https://louisvilleky.gov/events/greatest-bicycle-ride-honor-ali>

<http://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/boxing/muhammad-ali/2016/06/08/bike-ride-takes-cyclists-muhammad-ali-landmarks/85590458/>

<http://www.wlky.com/news/mayor-invites-cyclists-on-the-greatest-ride/39955864>

<http://www.wlky.com/news/cyclists-tour-muhammad-ali-landmarks-during-the-greatest-ride/39989084>

<http://www.whas11.com/entertainment/people/muhammad-ali/the-greatest-ride-an-honor-to-muhammad-ali/238585863>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=px\\_zobx\\_qt0&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=px_zobx_qt0&feature=youtu.be) (espy video)



## THE POWER OF WORDS – SPEECHES

The Mayor's Communication team prepared remarks for five events during the week:

- Flag-lowering ceremony the morning after Ali's death;
- Announcement of the I Am Ali Festival and launch of the [Alilouisville.com](http://Alilouisville.com) website;
- Press Conference discussing city's plans and preparations for Ali's funeral;
- Notes for opening of the I Am Ali Festival;
- Post-funeral reception at the Ali Center.

Our team immediately recognized that this was a unique moment in our city's history, one that carried with it special obligations and opportunities and required our full energy and attention.

On Friday afternoon (June 3), Chris Poynter, the Mayor's Director of Communications, tasked Deputy Director Jean Porter with creating an Ali fact sheet – significant dates,



events, places and quotes from, and about, Ali. This allowed the Mayor's speech writer, Graham Shelby, to focus on the overall theme and tenor of the speeches, starting with one for the next morning.

Of all the speeches, the one for the flag-lowering ceremony, which Mayor Fischer delivered at 10 a.m., Saturday, June 4, just in front of Metro Hall, turned out to be the most significant and well-received.

We adhered to our usual, collaborative process for speech writing, with Graham, the Mayor, Chris and others discussing themes and points to cover before Graham drafted an initial version for additional review and discussion. This speech came together in three drafts over the course of a few hours Friday evening and another hour with another draft on Saturday morning. It was carried in whole or in part by ESPN, CNN and other networks and quoted extensively in news

stories by national and international media outlets.

Muhammad Ali died around midnight on June 3 and the announcement coming immediately after his death meant that Mayor Fischer would, in a sense, be delivering Ali's first public eulogy, one that the media could broadcast. This, along with our advanced notice of the death, was a huge opportunity because in the hours after a global figure's death, there's a tremendous hunger among the media for new and relevant content.

From the start, we knew how we wanted the 5-minute speech crafted: A biography of Ali that was structured in reverse chronological order, starting with who he was by the end of his life, and ending with his life as a boy from Grand Avenue, as Louisville had known him. We wanted to emphasize his humanitarian achievements, as well as his athletic success, and finish with some notion of what we should take from his legacy.





## WHAT WE DID RIGHT

- Guidance from the Mayor and other top officials in his office – especially on the Saturday morning speech – provided Graham with clear overall direction while allowing sufficient room for him to create and execute as he saw fit and as the research guided. The Mayor was involved in every stage of editing, ensuring his voice came through.
- Jean edited and, crucially, fact-checked the text, which was enormously helpful because the tight time frame for writing restricted Graham's capacity to do that.
- The speech and ceremony, which featured the Louisville Metro Police Department Color Guard, set a tone of class, dignity, organization and authenticity for the week of events that would follow.



## WHAT WE COULD HAVE DONE BETTER

- Insist on clarity. As noted, the best speech was the one where we drew the parameters and stuck to them.



## LESSONS FOR OTHERS

- When it's your moment, go all out.

Flag Ceremony Speech:

<https://louisvilleky.gov/news/louisville-mayor-greg-fischers-remarks-passing-muhammad-ali>

**“I HATED EVERY MINUTE OF TRAINING, BUT I SAID, ‘DON’T QUIT. SUFFER NOW AND LIVE THE REST OF YOUR LIFE AS A CHAMPION.’ – MUHAMMAD ALI**

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## CLOSING

It is difficult to imagine a figure who might draw the same sort of media attention as Muhammad Ali – local, national, international, focusing on the many varied aspects of his life, from boxing to humanitarianism. Who else might draw a team of Sports reporters from ESPN but also news crews from CNN, Reuters, the BBC and NPR? Some 800 credentials were issued from all over the United States, as well as, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Russia, the Netherlands, Brazil, Australia, Canada, Japan, and more.

But there are lessons that we learned that will be of value to us going forward, and, we believe, to other cities, and the main one is this: Be prepared. Plan, and then be ready and able to rewrite and execute a new plan.

That starts with building the right team of people of diverse skills, people you can count on to do the job when called upon, and to do it well. It’s also a good idea to draw up a list of significant people from your community and start working now on elements you’ll need when they die, including a fact sheet with bio/significant events/significant quotes, which you can use to craft a media plan, which might include a web page. That will also show you where you might have holes – photos, videos, for example – that you might be able

to plug with partnerships from others, like your local newspaper or historical society.

We found it helpful to remind ourselves that our first responsibility was to our citizens that might seem simplistic, but in the case of the death of any important figure, there will be other agendas, from family or others, who are dealing with their own personal grief and other issues. In the case of Ali, for example, the family and BoxcarPR were understandably focused on funeral and burial services, and the many logistics involved in those.

But our citizens were clamoring for a more immediate way to come together and share their grief at Ali’s death and to celebrate his life. We held the June 4 flag-lowering ceremony, and created alilouisville.com and the I Am Ali festival out of a desire to meet the needs of our citizens.

The final lesson, of course, is that when the time comes, be committed to working long days and long nights to bring it all home – like a champion.

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**“THE FIGHT IS WON OR LOST FAR AWAY FROM WITNESSES – BEHIND THE LINES, IN THE GYM, AND OUT THERE ON THE ROAD, LONG BEFORE I DANCE UNDER THOSE LIGHTS.” – MUHAMMAD ALI**

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# SAMPLES OF MEDIA COVERAGE

[www.msnbc.com/msnbc-news/watch/ali-to-be-laid-to-rest-in-louisville-699135043869](http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc-news/watch/ali-to-be-laid-to-rest-in-louisville-699135043869)

MSNBC – Mayor Fischer talks about Louisville’s plans to honor Muhammad Ali.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36450989>

BBC – Muhammad Ali dies: Tributes to legendary boxer.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/muhammad-ali-belongs-to-the-world-but-he-only-has-one-home-town/2016/06/04/423a0f66-2a65-11e6-8329-6104954928d2-video.html>

Washington Post – Mayor Fischer: “Muhammad Ali belongs to the world, but he only has one hometown.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jun/04/ali-remembered-louisville-kentucky>

The Guardian – Ali remembered by the town that raised him.

[http://espn.go.com/boxing/story/\\_/id/15953974/muhammad-ali-funeral-slated-friday-louisville-preceded-public-procession](http://espn.go.com/boxing/story/_/id/15953974/muhammad-ali-funeral-slated-friday-louisville-preceded-public-procession)

ESPN – Mayor Fischer orders Louisville flags at half-staff for Muhammad Ali.

<http://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2016/06/06/louisville-mourns-ali>

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ABC News – Louisville honors its hometown hero, Muhammad Ali.

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/08/us/muhammad-ali-louisville/>

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<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/muhammad-ali-the-greatest-dead-louisville-kentucky-mourns-favorite-son-procession-funeral/>

CBS News – Louisville says goodbye to Muhammad Ali.

<http://time.com/4357755/what-muhammad-ali-meant-to-louisville/>

Time – What Muhammad Ali meant to Louisville.

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c33185c198d843a18c4c58092d55f735/alis-hometown-louisville-mourns-its-favorite-son>

Associated Press – Ali will draw the world to Louisville for his final farewell.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-people-ali-idUSKCN0YU2A9>

Reuters – Ali's legend floats like a butterfly through hometown celebration.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/11/sports/muhammad-ali-funeral.html>

New York Times – A stirring farewell to Ali, just as he scripted it.

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2016/06/06/muhammad-ali-scripted-funeral-plans-in-exacting-detail-in-book.html>

Fox News – Ali scripted his funeral plans in exacting detail.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/watch-live-muhammad-ali-funeral-at-2-pm-et-friday/>

PBS News Hour – Muhammad Ali laid to rest in Louisville.

[http://espn.go.com/boxing/story/\\_/id/16094797/muhammad-ali-processional-burial-louisville-kentucky](http://espn.go.com/boxing/story/_/id/16094797/muhammad-ali-processional-burial-louisville-kentucky)

ESPN – Thousands of people turn out for Ali processional in Louisville.

<http://www.npr.org/2016/06/04/480772237/muhammad-ali-s-louisville-roots>

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<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/023f987e82c845e8b2a70252438ae416/ali-became-world-citizen-never-forgot-his-hometown-roots>

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<https://www.yahoo.com/news/mayor-greg-fischer-talks-giving-230712227.html>

Yahoo News – Mayor Fischer talks about city giving Ali his final wish.

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<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-muhammad-ali-louisville-20160604-story.html>

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Daily Beast – Muhammad Ali knocks out the Confederacy in Louisville.

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    **Kara Mackey**, Special Events  
    **Mike Maloney**, Special Events  
    **Monica Sheckles**, Special Events  
    **Brent Turner**, Special Events  
    **Dan Young**, Special Events  
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